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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQI SECURITY; IRANIAN OIL; ARAB LEAGUE
NON-PROLIFERATION EFFORTS; MARINE SONG FALLOUT

SUMMARY: Government-owned daily "Oman" is skeptical about Iraq's future security; "al-Watan" notes strategic competition for Iran's oil among Russia, the U.S. and China and expresses concern about proliferation and pollution in the Middle East. A commentator opines that "scandals and abominations" continue in Iraq, despite apologies on the heels of a Marine's Internet posting of a song about violence against Iraqi civilians. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

¶1. On June 26, all Omani papers carried prominent front-page coverage of the previous day's Palestinian attack on an Israeli checkpoint. English-language papers carried wire-service coverage, on which Arabic papers also drew, adding that Palestinian militants had "martyred" themselves. Iran coverage continued, often on the front-page, but generally below the fold. On June 28, the English-language "Oman Tribune" (circ. 8,000) carried a Reuters story, "Marine Who Sang about Killing Iraqis to go Scot Free." On its opinion page, English-language "Oman Observer" (circ. 20,000) on June 28 carried Michael Adler's commentary for AFP saying that now is the "Time for Compromise" between Iran and the West.

BLOCK QUOTES: SKEPTICISM ABOUT IRAQI SECURITY

¶2. Government-owned daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) on June 22 questioned the future of Iraq: "What Comes after Baghdad's Security Plan?"

"Despite the security plan drafted in Baghdad and the presence of more than 50,000 American and Iraqi troops, violence continues. More innocent people are dying every day, part of the chaotic, pathetic environment that has persisted in Iraq for more than three years. There are reports that the foreign presence will be drawn down next year, in line with Japan's and Italy's withdrawal. On top of this, the Iraqi National Reconciliation has been postponed for security reasons. There seems no exit in the near future from the Iraqi dilemma..."

STRATEGIC COMPETITION FOR IRAN'S OIL

¶3. The privately owned Arabic daily "al-Watan" (circulation 42,000), editorialized June 22 on "The Race to Tehran":

"The world is witnessing political maneuvers on the Iranian nuclear issue, with America now participating directly in negotiations. This comes in tandem with strategic competition among China, Russia, and the U.S., all of whom seek the benefits of Iranian oil reserves. In the end, this competition will define the direction of Iran's nuclear projects, as well as its political and economic roles in the Middle East. The final outcome will be a function of who wins the race to develop Iran's huge oil and gas resources."

ARAB LEAGUE NON-PROLIFERATION EFFORTS

¶4. In a June 26 editorial, "Is there Any Mechanism for Implementation?," "al-Watan" speculated on Arab League efforts to ban weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East:

"How can the Arab League implement its decisions and resolutions? Many Arab initiatives in the past regarding sensitive issues in the Arab world failed to see the light of day because there were no proper mechanisms to compel compliance from member states. Even if members discovered proper mechanisms, how could Israel be convinced to submit its nuclear program to international scrutiny? The United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency should cooperate to free this area from destructive weapons. The Arabs hope to free the Middle East from weapons of mass destruction and their environmental consequences."

"SCANDALS AND ABOMINATIONS"

MUSCAT 00001023 002 OF 002

¶5. On June 26, "Al-Watan" carried a commentary, "The Marine Singer's Apology," by Kazem al-Musawi (described as "an Arab writer and journalist in London"), prolonging local fallout from the appearance online of a Marine's song praising violence against Iraqi civilians:

"The story of the tape [of the song] has ended for now; it has been removed from the site...the accompanying scandals and abominations have not ended. Publicizing them will not stop, American officials' defense of them will not stop, and violations against Arab and Muslim victims will not stop. The song's lyrics described the behavior of American soldiers, their attitudes toward Iraqi women and the Iraqi people who have not received them cordially... The story of this Marine is trivial compared to the daily massacres that the leaders of the war and the occupation, leaders from the White House to the Green Zone, are responsible for."

GRAPPO